



### ON “ALIEN AND LOVELY” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Intimacy is dangerous. One great casualty of the post-modern era is intimacy in works of higher art; especially intimacy like we see here, where the angles and composition suggest not only intimacy but “duende.” Moving beyond the rote quiddities of the innocence/experience binary, notice how the female subject seems not only to be seducing but orgasmically receiving the intrusion of the lens into her personal space. The miniature, rather dainty little cross she’s wearing (aligned in a pure vertical line with her face and head) makes explicit that the carnal for her has at least a touch of the godly in it; and a touch of sanctity makes her aura more adorable. The evidence suggests that Jeremy took this picture in the South Jersey Philly suburbs where he was raised— for this South Jersey, inverse-Madonna to become an international carnality-signifier, all you have to do is look, and she knows that. She’s Catholic, as was Jeremy’s taste. South Jersey’s form of transgression is working class, abrupt, and made raw by the hopelessly material (and materialistic) nature of Catholic

spirituality. When this protagonist falls, she falls onto crosses; and the lowliness of her human flesh, in a contradictory way, deifies her beyond all belief.

It's not just that Jeremy's genius was to take a camera to bed; his "eye" is more made flesh than any in American history. Jeremy has translated South Jersey into France. Notice, however, that this Muse is no beauty queen; she's not precisely humble, either. She's willfully cute. Her flesh is accessible. Look how she appears, from the camera angle, to be in the midst of rolls and tumbles— you want her, and you've got her. From Marilyn to Britney, America is all about mannequin sexuality; this, however, is image made flesh.

Yet, as Jeremy was shrewd enough to notice, sex is strange, "alien." The you that's fucking, that tastes the sloppy bittersweet-ness of raw flesh, is another you; it's not the you that eats, shits, or creates. It's an essential you that nonetheless keeps slipping off into nothingness, and the congeries of all these elements stays sloppy. Perfect moments in this context are accidentally so; like our inverse-Madonna's cross and face. What's alien in intimacy can also be lovely, even in the muck of derelict/Frenchified South Jersey. Everything about this shot is a revelation of Otherness— including the unique sense of arrested motion which hits our guts with intimations of Lorca and European ambience being pierced and split in half. That's why this Muse is mischievous— as the camera doesn't know, it's capturing multiple and contradictory realities. The Muse's body is an embodied crossroads; and the action (crucially) is transpiring in the full light of day. Nothing is to be hidden.

The full revelation of alien loveliness has no alienation in it; all is smoothness and moisture. The smoothness and moisture are in the depths as well as the surface; and what erupts from the necessary friction is that genuine salvation is (or can be) skin, and is equally available in France or South Jersey, hidden or not by shadows or night. We are all rewarded because Jeremy poked a hole in America. Because America and American art prizes fame and despises anonymity, he pierces past this cultural folkway and creates a novel America, both fertile and anonymous, sublime and obscure. All he had to do was interrupt a make-out session and snap a few pictures— the fortuitous cross on which Old America is redly nailed, was probably not his idea. It didn't need to be— he received as he thrust too. A collusion of miracles had to happen to take our Word and make it flesh— if you believe in miracles, art, or the interstices between them, like the wood-slatted bridge between France and South Jersey.

Adam Fieled, 2013